

Alan L. Braun
1516 Frienship Rd.
Jefferson City, MO 65101

Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C.

Dear Sir:

Enclosed are my formal comments in the matter of PRB docket number 93-267 (RM-8288), relating to granting temporary operating authority to persons who have passed amateur radio examinations, prior to actual issuance of their licenses by the Commission. I am enclosing 6 copies of these comments, which is what I understand to be the requirement for such filings.

If you need any additional information please let me know.

Sincerely,

Alan L. Braun

Alan L. Braun, M.D.

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NOV 29 1995

Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D. C. 20554

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In the matter of)
)
Amendment of the Amateur Radio) PR 93-267
Service Rules to Grant Temporary)
Operating Authority to Unlicensed)
Persons After Passing an Examination)

To: The Commission

COMMENTS OF ALAN L. BRAUN, NS/B

I. Summary. This proposal, while it provides a means of addressing a situation that many amateur radio operators perceive to be a problem, is seriously flawed. It is not the most efficient means of solving the problem, and it creates significant opportunities for abuse of the amateur radio bands by persons who will, for all practical purposes, be untraceable.

II. Introduction. I have been a licensed amateur radio operator since 1985, and am active on both the high-frequency (HF) and very high frequency (VHF) bands. In addition, I am certified as a Volunteer Examiner by the American Radio Relay League Volunteer Examination Coordinator (VEC), and have directed or participated in over fifty examination sessions in the last five years. I have had the opportunity to observe rule violations both in general operating situations and within the examination system, and feel that this gives me an added perspective to the problems that could be created by this proposal.

III. Description of the Problem. The problem which this proposal tries to address is the long delay experienced by persons who have passed amateur radio examinations, prior to receiving their licenses. It also appears that this proposal is an attempt to reduce the volume of telephone calls received by the Commission from individuals inquiring about the status of their applications.

Under the current rules, these people cannot legally transmit on the amateur bands until they receive their licenses and call signs from the Commission's Private Radio Bureau (PRB) in Gettysburg,

PA. Typically, applicants wait 3 to 4 months from the time they pass their examinations until they receive their licenses. Current rules place a legal limit of 120 days on this time span, and most of the time this is about how long it takes. The candidates are generally very anxious to receive their licenses and get "on the air". When months go by without their licenses arriving, they begin to wonder if their paperwork has gotten lost, so they make telephone calls, either to the VEC which handled their examination, or directly to the PRB. In either case, much staff time is wasted handling these calls. My understanding is that the PRB has only a single employee assigned to process all amateur radio applications, and that this person is only assigned to this task one day a week. Presumably this low staffing level is a result of inadequate funding in the PRB. I will offer two suggestions to address this problem.

IV. Critique of this Proposal. The proposed new rules would allow an unlicensed person who qualifies for an amateur license to "create" his or her own temporary call sign, using some structured criteria. As I understand it, this would be a call sign in the WZ#--- series, where # would be the VEC region in which the person resides, and the 3 subsequent characters would be the initials of the candidate's name. The candidate would be authorized to operate with this temporary call sign until the permanent one arrived later from the PRB. The idea of this is to satisfy the applicant's impatience by allowing immediate operation, and thus relieve the burden of phone calls and correspondence experienced by the PRB.

I see several potential problems with this scheme:

1. First, the possibility exists that more than one person could be legitimately operating with the same call sign at the same time, if several people with the same initials were to pass examinations within the same time frame in the same geographic area. This risk increases the larger the area is, and would be most likely to pose a problem in the 4th and 6th VEC regions (the Southeastern USA and California, respectively).
2. More importantly, it appears that there would be no record anywhere of who is using which call sign. Therefore, if a person using this temporary authority were to violate the amateur service

rules, there would be no way to find him or her due to the lack of records.

3. This system would make it much simpler for a person who wished to operate without taking an examination at all to do so, as there would be an entire block of call signs "free for the taking". Such a person could operate using a fictitious, but legitimate-sounding call sign for as long as he or she chose to do so, with almost no risk of detection. This is a potential problem no matter what method is used to administer call signs, even the current one: I have personally observed such conduct locally on one occasion, by a person who was later cited by the Commission for falsifying papers given to him after an examination (prior to his exam, he had operated on the local VHF repeater for several months using someone else's legitimate call sign). However, the potential for such behavior would be multiplied many fold under this proposal.

V. Some other solutions to the problem. I can see at least 3 other ways to address this problem; I think the Commission should seriously consider one or more of these options prior to making a rule change.

1. The PRB appears to be seriously understaffed insofar as processing amateur radio applications is concerned. This proposal would not even be necessary were that not the case. It seems to me that the simplest way to solve the problem would be to increase the staff time devoted to this function, either by assigning the existing staff to it for a larger percentage of their time, or by hiring part-time help from a temporary personnel pool. If the processing delay could be reduced to 4-6 weeks, I think there would be a significant drop in the number of calls and complaints. This would be much more cost effective than increasing the enforcement staff in the manner which likely would be needed to police the results of this proposal. If funds are not available to do this in the current budget, perhaps a fee of \$5 or \$10 for processing of first-time license applications could be instituted to pay for the secretarial help, if there were some way to insure that the FCC would be able to keep this money rather than turning it over to the Treasury's

general revenue fund.

2. Another possibility would be for the PRB to develop a standard computer file format for licensing information, and then require the VECs to submit information to the PRB electronically rather than on paper as is the case now. This should drastically reduce the amount of staff time needed at the PRB to process these applications, and thus significantly speed the process without requiring additional staff. Precedent for this already exists within the Federal government in the Medicare program. By occupation I am a medical doctor; my office submits medical claim data to Medicare electronically, and is paid within 7 days on electronic submissions instead of 30 days as would be the case if we filed paper claims. Legal authority already exists for submission of unsigned license applications, which would otherwise be the major barrier to this idea.
3. If the Commission feels it really is necessary to initiate a temporary call sign program, I think there are a number of better ways to do it. I suggest that the Commission assign to each of the VEC's a block of call sign suffixes, based on the volume of examinations each one gives, and then allow the VEC's to dispense them sequentially to examination teams for assignment as needed. This could be done using forms similar to the current "Certificate of Successful Completion of Examination" (CSCE), each of which could be imprinted in advance with a particular call sign. Or, the call sign assignment could be incorporated into a revision of the existing CSCE form for new licensees, so as not to increase the paperwork burden on the exam teams. The VEC's would be required to keep records of who got which call sign, and it would be possible to tell by the structure of the call sign which VEC it came from, so finding a person operating under temporary authorization would not be difficult should it be necessary.

Let me cite a specific example to show how this might work: in the 10th VEC district, where I live, the majority of examinations are provided by 4 VECs (ARRL, W5YI, DeVry and PHD). If we assume, for the sake of this example, that ARRL and W5YI each give 40% of the

exams in the 0 district while DeVry and PHD each give 10%, the WZ0 block could be broken down as follows:

WZ0AAA-WZ0JZZ to ARRL-VEC,

WZ0KAA-WZ0TZZ to W5YI-VEC

WZ0UAA-WZ0WZZ to DeVry

WZ0XAA-WZ0ZZZ to PHD.

Each VEC would assign calls sequentially within its block, and would not re-use a call until all the calls in its block had been exhausted. An exam team which is "field-stocked" with supplies could be issued in advance enough call signs to last 3 months or so, while a team which gives exams on an individually scheduled basis could be issued enough to cover the anticipated need for that session, and return whatever went unused. Later, if it became necessary for some reason for the FCC or an "Official Observer" to locate a particular operator, say WZ0GZA, they would know to contact the ARRL-VEC, which would then be able to identify that person for them. This would be impossible under the system outlined in the current proposal.

VI. Conclusion. While the current proposal represents a good-faith effort to solve a significant problem, it contains some serious flaws. I have attempted to address these and provide some alternate solutions; I'm sure that there are many other ways this could be accomplished, especially in terms of other ways to implement what I've suggested in my solution #3. I respectfully request that the Commission reconsider the current proposal and attempt to modify it to reduce the potential for abuse.

Alan Braun MD (NS0B), 1516 Friendship Rd., Jefferson City MO 65101